

LEONOR BRIONES:

Parallel Trends of Globalization



Lito Ocampo

The impact of globalisation on peasant women is worse.

Globalization is a reality. It is felt almost worldwide. It has affected all aspects of collective and individual existence in most countries of the world, says Leonor Briones, chair of the

Bangkok-based regional non-government organization (NGO) Focus on the Global South and the Asia coordinator of Social Watch, a global network of NGOs monitoring the implementation of government commitments to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Summits on social development and women.

Briones, who is a public administration professor at the University of the Philippines, sees globalization not only as an economic phenomenon but as a social and political one as well. "Pro-democracy movements and human rights campaigns have [also] become global concerns. The cause of the environment as part of our 'common future' is recognized in all countries. Problems of social development—poverty, unemployment, social disintegration and gender issues—are also the subject of world wide campaigns," Briones says.

She views the work of the UNDP and other United Nations organizations as having contributed much to the globalization of the above concerns. The series of global UN summits on social development, women, population and housing have focused global attention to these. At the same time, NGO alternative meetings which

parallel the annual World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Asian Development Bank Meetings are now "regular events" which bring issues left out in meetings of governments and international institutions to the fore. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit held in the Philippines in late 1996 was matched by parallel summits by different organizations. The APEC summit in Vancouver, Canada also had alternative NGO summits. But while globalization is "beneficial" in the worldwide development of social movements, this woman activist says the "dark side of its force" should not be underestimated.

In a paper she read at the First International Women's Conference on APEC held in Manila in November 1996, Briones said that the individual action plans of the APEC countries are gender-blind. While commitments on tariffs, investment, intellectual property rights, deregulation and mobility of business people are supposed to be neutral, because women do not enjoy equality in APEC countries in varying degrees, their capacity to cope with the wide-ranging changes that APEC will bring about will be limited, Briones said. In the Philippines, women's share of earned income is only 21 percent in relation to men's 79 percent. In terms of occupation, women account for only 27.7 percent of administrative and managerial positions. One can immediately see that women in the Philippines do not and cannot have much participation in the formulation, adoption and implementation of the action plans.

In the same 1996 conference, Briones added several pro-women calls to those already being demanded by women's groups: full implementation of commitments made by APEC countries at the UN Summits on Social Development, Women and other global summits, commitments which include gender-specific measures that governments are duty-bound to implement; increase government budgets for social services that should target the lowest income groups and prioritize women; impose penalties for gender discrimination at the workplace and institute safeguards for the rights of the child.

For this issue on globalization, *Women in Action* spoke with Leonor Briones. Excerpts:

Q: How do you define globalization? What do you think is its impact on women?

A: Considering that 75 percent of poverty is in Asia, even as many of the so-called tiger economies are also in Asia, Asia reflects what is going on globally in contrasts. Asia is the home of fast growing economies, supposedly the *nouveaux riches* economies, but poverty is also most intensely concentrated in the region since more than 70 percent of the poor are in Asia. Asia reflects both the global rich which is a small percentage, and the global poor which is the bigger percentage. Now if you look at globalization in the immediate term as a factor exacerbating poverty, then you can say that many Asian women are affected by globalization.

What is globalization? Globalization is the integration of the world economy. Under globalization, the economies of many different developing countries are opened up to the more advanced or industrialized countries. Primarily, trade and finance are being opened up and there is goods freely flowing between countries that are also being integrated. So in the short run, poor countries become really pathetic because they cannot compete with the "big" countries that are organized into one.

Now while globalization is economic, the impact is not only economic but also political, social and cultural. So the impact of globalization is really big especially on Asian women since poverty is concentrated on women.

Q: Which particular aspects of Asian women's life are affected?

A: Unemployment. In the Philippines, Filipinos prefer imported goods so many manufacturing corporations are now losing. There's a slowdown in manufacturing, and many women are employed in manufacturing. There's also a slowdown in agriculture, and even more women are employed in agriculture. So the impact on them is worse.

Q: Would the impact be different on women of the North?

A: The impact on the women of the North depends on which side they are at. There is also a north and south in Northern countries. There are also very serious pockets of poverty even in



Globalize social development, human rights and democratic institutions, says Leonor Briones

the United States. The rich in the North are usually in the minority. Although they have a slightly bigger middle class, their very wealthy are also in the minority.

If a Northern woman is a banker or a president of the university or a member of a policy think-tank or in the academe, then globalization will bring her pleasure. But if a Northern woman is among the poor of the North, then globalization will have a bad impact. On the other hand, if you're a woman living in the south, but you belong to the rich of that particular southern country then you are in a position to benefit from globalization. It really depends on where you are.

What I'm saying is that poverty does not only exist in the South or that wealth is only in the North. Even in the so-called south like Asia, you also have north and south.

But the problem is most women are poor. The question is how many women are suffering? How many women are having a better life?

Q: Do you believe there is a globalization and feminization of poverty?

A: Yes, there is globalization and feminization of poverty. Poverty is at a global scale, that's why I said when you talk of a global North, you're also talking of a global south.

Q: Can women benefit from globalization?

A: Right now not very many women are benefiting from globalization. But it is possible for

women to benefit from globalization if they belong to the north of their particular society. I'm very sure banking or export executives are benefiting from globalization. But ordinary women right now are not because of the slowdown in manufacturing and in agriculture. Ordinary women can benefit in the long-term but they have to work together with men. Women cannot always do things by themselves. They are not apart from society.

I have two views of globalization. Globalization is not only globalization of business and the economy; there is a parallel trend. This is the globalization of the democratic institutions, social development and human rights and the women's movement. We can benefit from this if women make this the more dominant form of globalization. Women can make this other form of globalization dominant vis-a-vis economic globalization.

Many NGOs in the North and in the South are now talking to each other and helping each other out. For example, many are now helping set up financing schemes. In alternative trade, it is the same. But right now these are not very significant but these can be much more important. That should depend on us.

Q: What should women's groups focus on right now?

A: Alternative trade, livelihood, alternative cultures, lifestyle, involvement in education, sharing of information, etc. There is now so much improvement in information technology, you can easily obtain information about something very fast.

Isis is itself a globalising NGO. You reach women all over the world and know what's happening all over. You can take advantage of these global events. As long as this is your perspective on globalisation, then there are many opportunities for women to benefit from.)